

U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop has come out swinging for new federal emergency aid in the range of \$5.9 billion for farmers who have suffered extreme crop and livestock losses due to drought and other weather-related disasters over the past two years.

Firing off letters to President Bush, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), and Senate Minority Leader Thomas Daschle (D-SD), the Second District Congressman said more than 80 percent of the country's farm communities have been hit hard by drought and other weather disasters, and new federal emergency assistance is critically needed to enable many farmers to survive and to ease the "negative economic impact...on rural America."

With farm income expected to decline by 22 percent from 2001 levels, he said the need for emergency farm help is critical to the future of U.S. agriculture. In Georgia, he said, drought conditions have created one of the most serious economic situations in memory, including the 27 counties in the Second District which have all been declared disaster areas.

Representative Bishop sent a letter to President Bush asking him to include funding for drought relief in his proposed new federal budget that he will soon submit to Congress. He also sent a letter expressing support for an amendment by Senator Daschle to an omnibus appropriations bill to provide \$5.9 billion more this fiscal year for farm disaster relief, and sent a third letter to Senator Frist urging him to support the Daschle amendment. So far, neither President Bush nor Republican leaders in Congress have agreed to support new farm disaster aid.

The Friends of Andersonville, a citizen support group, plans to give the land to the National Park Service after purchasing it for \$50,000. But the donation cannot legally be accepted unless the bill is passed, the Congressman explained. He said the project has the support of the Macon County Commission.

The Georgia lawmaker pointed out that loan deficiency payments to farmers are expected to be reduced this year by \$5.9 billion, and this frees up this amount for critically needed disaster relief.

"On the heels of the second consecutive year of devastating drought conditions, in which over 80 percent of the agricultural producing counties in the United States have received disaster declarations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this disaster relief package is critical to the survival of many of our nation's producers," Representative Bishop said in his letter to Senator Daschle. "It is in the strongest voice possible that I support a full disaster package, one that does not include offsets that would compromise the livelihood of producers by creating payment limitations."